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ETCHINGS,

FROM THE WORKS

OF

Ric. Wilson

WITH SOME MEMOIRS OF HIS LIFE, &c.

BY THOMAS HASTINGS, ESQ.

COLLECTOR OF HIS MAJESTY'S CUSTOMS.

"NON DUCTUS OFFICIO SED AMORE OPERIS." QUINTILLIAN.

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INTRODUCTORY REMARKS.

INDEPENDENT of the difficulty of writing the Life of a Man whose career was not marked with any very extraordinary events, the inutility of the attempt is evident, since the principal features of Richard Wilson's Life have already appeared before the Public.[a]

To the admirers of Richard Wilson, as an Artist of the English School of Painting; the following remarks and anecdotes regarding him may be acceptable, and perhaps deemed a fit accompaniment to the Etchings, which have occupied most of my leisure time during the last four years.

To the Artist, and to the Amateur well advanced in the delightful School of Painting; the compositions of Richard Wilson must, I humbly conceive, ever prove a fund infinitely entertaining and highly instructive. There is scarcely a production of his to be found, but what bears with it traits of much elegance of mind,

[a] See Michael Bryan's Dictionary of Painters and Engravers; Pilkington's Dictionary of Painters; and also a late Publication by Longman and Co. Paternoster Row.

arising from the effects of an excellent classic education. In his breadths he stands unrivalled. He never sacrificed it for the sake of unnecessary detail or enamel painting. Breadth, one of Wilson's great forts, either of design, of light and shade, or of colouring, is not easily understood: it is a power that can only be shewn by superior genius, or strength of conception, and cannot be felt, but through a long acquaintance with Nature and Art. If, in the observance of this great desideratum, Wilson was negligent and slovenly, (and which indeed must be acknowledged was too often the case,) some excuse may perhaps be offered by the following fact, that a great many of his oil *Sketches* were, during his life, either purchased or taken away *as such*, or put on one side for future attention and finishing; but which, after death, came into the possession of the Collector or Connoisseur, and then shewn as "A Wilson!"

However faulty Wilson was in this respect, it may be truly said, that He was a Mighty Master, and that his productions had a thousand captivations: nay, I will venture to say, (in unison with the opinion of one

of his great Admirers,) that where he committed his thoughts on canvas, the observant might readily be led into a belief, that if Nature was not exactly as he pourtrayed her, it would be better if she were! that more abruptness would make her more lovely, and that she looked with more majesty when convulsed, than when pacific. Wilson, notwithstanding, had the power to paint as beautifully as any Artist who ever held a palette. The truth of this might readily be acknowledged by any one conversant in the art of painting, could he obtain a sight of that invaluable production, called "THE TEMPLE OF MINERVA MEDICA." This painting is in the possession of Lady Ford, of Gloucester Place, and the subject forms one of the Etchings of my present Work.[a] This induces me to notice some particulars regarding the paintings of R. Wilson, from which, through Lady Ford's kindness and friendship, I have executed my present Etchings.

[a] Mr. Constable, of the Royal Academy, a gentleman deservedly high in the estimation of the World, as a Landscape Painter, remarked to me on his seeing it, that he thought "it went far beyond any thing he ever before saw of Wilson's works, and that in his opinion, it possessed all the rigidity of the Italian School, with that great breadth so natural to the Master."

But before I proceed, I had better perhaps give a faint outline of the Life of Wilson, for those who may not possess the Biographical Sketches regarding him, which have been so ably penned and published to the world.

Richard Wilson was the son of a respectable Clergyman of the Church of England, who was Rector of Peneges, in Montgomeryshire, in Wales. He was born in August, 1714. At about fifteen years of age he began the study of Portrait Painting, with a view of following that branch of the art professionally. Possessing naturally a warm imagination, and having acquired a great taste for the classics, he was easily persuaded to listen to the advice which was given him, to go abroad and study landscape painting. By the writer of two or three little accounts of R. Wilson, credit has been given to Zucarelli, as having been the person who advised him to relinquish Portrait for Landscape Painting. Possessed as I am of a fact relative to this important event in our great Artist's life, it is my duty to say, that a very particular and worthy friend of mine,

and a gentleman of the highest respectability, (Mr. R. . . . . s) assured me, in a circumstancial detail of a story regarding R. Wilson, that his friend Mr. Lock, of Norbury Park, was the person to whom this honour is due. He discovered in Wilson the sparks of early genius for Landscape Painting, and which he rightly judged could only be brought to maturity on classic ground!

Wilson soon left the shores of his native country to study, agreeably to the advice which had been given to him, amid scenes more congenial to his youthful and vigorous imagination, and to feed the ardent fire of his classic store.[a]

His success was rapid, and his abilities soon began to shine. Not long after his arrival in Italy, he became intimately acquainted with Zucarelli. From him,

[a] It cannot readily be conceived, that it could ever have been deemed adviseable or necessary, (poor as Wilson was in pecuniary, but rich in other resources, as we find was the case from the various accounts already given to the world respecting him,) for him to go abroad to study *Portrait* Painting. The natural conclusion must be otherwise; and if he had not discovered a strong feeling, and an extraordinary taste for *Landscape* Painting, he need not have put himself to the unnecessary great expense of travelling to a country, which I believe never could boast of talent so great as could be found in this, for *Portrait Painting*.

Wilson, who then comparatively was young in the art of Landscape Painting, derived very great advantage. His powers soon rivalled those of his friend Zucarelli, to whose immortal honour it is reported, and firmly believed, that he, in his attachment and enthusiastic admiration of the rising abilities of his young friend and student, Wilson, recommended his productions in preference to his own, and took every occasion of speaking of them in the highest praise.[a] As his advances were great in art, so his ambition kept pace, and uplifted him honourably in the profession in which he was engaged. After remaining abroad some time, he returned to his native country with a numerous collection of sketches of foreign scenery: his powers soon unfolded themselves, and they stood confessed by an admiring Academy, in his celebrated pictures of Celadon and Amelia, and Niobe, which were exhibited at Somerset House.

[a] He became also intimately acquainted with Vernet, whose conduct towards Wilson was remarkably handsome and liberal on many occasions. During this course of study with Zucarelli, it was natural for Wilson to have imbibed somewhat at least, if not considerably of his style. There are several of Wilson's paintings bearing with them a little of Zucarelli's manner and handling, and a remarkable instance of this exists in a very fine production of his, now in the possession of Mr. Anderdon, of Harley Street, Cavendish Square.

Wilson possessed a great degree of modesty, and perhaps this was the principal cause of his not reaping the well-earned fruits of his abundant and prolific pencil. Late in life he was appointed Librarian to the Royal Academy, but when from infirmity he was under the necessity of relinquishing his professional avocations, the King of England granted him an annuity from his Privy Purse, with which he retired into Wales, and in May, 1782, in the sixty-eighth year of his age, amid the scenes of his early youth, ended his peaceful days.

Remarks on the Utility of Engravings and Etchings.

Paintings and Drawings rarely gratify the eye but of the possessor, while Engravings and Etchings, producing a multiplicity of one and the same object, become dispersed in most parts of the civilized World. In the event of accident to Paintings, it often happens that, through the powers of the Etching Needle, some vestiges of what were once so great are preserved, and

the remembrance of some invaluable productions are rescued from total oblivion.

Independent of the amusement which Engravings and Etchings afford to the curious, the assistance they are of to general information is wonderful: by them much mental improvement may be obtained, together with considerable rational entertainment, and continued intellectual pleasure. I hardly ever saw a production, possessing even a share of mediocrity, but it contained a something, which rendered it interesting either from the scene it represented, the intention of the Artist in the original composition, &c. or skill displayed in the transcription.

I am quite aware of many of the defects which exist in my attempts from the Paintings of Richard Wilson, and in my over anxiety I may have evinced much timidity. They are, however, but finished Etchings.

Etchings in general by untutored observers, may readily be considered as rough and hasty productions; although, as is the case with similar works of many of the Old Masters, (particularly the Painters,) they

possess more stirling beauties than are capable of being conceived at first sight.

The slight Etching on the Title-page of this Work was, (as is mentioned at the bottom of it,) traced from an original sketch made by Sir George Beaumont, and although there is nothing that can recommend it on the score of merit as a drawing, yet as it bore a strong stamp of character of the person whom it was intended to represent, I have deemed it sufficiently interesting to give it a place. The name, "Ric. Wilson," is a facsimile of his autograph, which I carefully traced from a receipt, which is now in the possession of Mr. R. Ford. Of the several paintings from which I have been enabled to complete the present Etchings; I have only had the good fortune to obtain information respecting a few.

Paul Sanby was with Richard Wilson at the time the Sketch was made for the subject of

HOUNSLOW HEATH.

RUINS OF MECÆNAS' VILLA, NEAR TIVOLI.

These remains stand on the banks of the River Anio, which runs into the Tiber, twenty miles distant from Rome. The building to the right of it, among the Cypress trees, is a Convent of Jesuits. The temple beneath that, was built in honour of the god Tussis. The spring, which issues out of the rock on the left, is the Fons Blandusa of Horace, whose Villa stood behind the trees on the left, fronting Mecænas' Villa. The drawing was taken on the spot by Mr. Wilson, in the year 1754, in company with the Earls of Pembroke, Thanet, and Essex, and Lord Viscount Bolingbroke; who dined and spent the day together on the spot, under a large tree. The dress of the two women dipping for water, is the present dress of the country.

VALE OF NARNI.

This is a delightful painting, about two feet eighteen inches high, by one foot sixteen inches broad,

and may with truth be considered one of the best little paintings in Lady Ford's valuable collection. The scene is about forty miles distant from Rome.

VIEW IN ITALY.

This View (on the River Arno) has frequently been painted by R. Wilson. Indeed it is a sweet composition, and commands particular and continued attention. There is a large splendid upright Painting, executed by R. Wilson, from a Sketch which he made on the opposite bank of the river. It was painted for the late Thomas Caryll Worsley, Esq. of Platt Hall, near Manchester, in 1760. It is about five feet high, and was originally painted on the panel, over the fire-place in the drawing-room. Wilson received about forty-pounds for it; and now perhaps it is worth twenty times that sum! There is also a magnificent and truly superb painting of the same view in the possession of Sir John Leicester, of Hill Street, Berkeley Square. This incom-

parable production baffles all adequate description!—To me it is quite affectingly fine!—It is impossible for any one susceptible of any feeling for the delightful Art of Landscape Painting, to behold it; and not to be immediately sensible that some high merits are then shining before him.—According to the scale of my humble ideas of art, I should think it difficult to conceive that Landscape Painting could be carried to a higher degree of excellence, or that any similar work could breathe a more delicious sensibility.—It is about eight feet in length, and proportionably high.

THE GYPSIES.

View near Albano, Peasants of ditto, or Frescati.

The painting from which I made this Etching is a good specimen of the Master. Lady Ford has one of the same subject, somewhat smaller, and is about thirteen inches in length. It differs a little in the treatment. In it the large trunk of the tree near which the figures are placed, is not carried to the very top,

(or out) of the Picture; and the two women are differently composed. The nearest stands with her back to the observer, and on the stone on the left corner is a memorandum, (if this stone was not meant to represent a mile stone,) of "xv miles from Rome."

VIEW OF LA RICCIA, NEAR ROME.

This Painting is rather more than two feet in length, and possesses an unusual share of finish from Wilson's palette. It is held in the highest estimation, and may be considered a most enviable production. The delightful manner with which Wilson has conducted his light from the right of the picture, through the composition, in the interesting representation of the Convent and Monks is quite charming.

THE BAY OF BAIÆ, FROM POSILIPPO.

The most distant mountain immediately opposite the building on the left hand side of the subject, is *Pro-*

cida, that just over the ruin, is *Ischia*. Between these distant mountains, nearest Ischia,—the Elysian Fields are situated—Micenum,—from whence the Roman fleets sailed for the invasion of Britain,—is on the shores of the Bay, below the Elysian Fields and the fore-ground of the Painting.

The tomb of Agripina stands on the right of Micenum from Posilippo. Baiæ rests on the right of it, and the remains of the Hot Baths of Nero a little below, or nearer the town from whence the view was taken. The ruin more immediately in front was Cicero's Villa, and the building on the left is one of the houses of Posilippo.

TEMPLE OF VENUS.

One of those bright and fortunate moments which now and then shine on man, and lead him by lucky guidance to a *happy hit*, fell on me when I first discovered this excellent Painting of R. Wilson.—It was

dragged from its old hiding place, in a miserable shop in the neighbourhood of the Seven Dials, near St. Giles's; covered with dirt, so thick, that I could hardly decide whether it was a Landscape or not. A very little trouble soon undeceived me, and I was very happy to conclude for the purchase of it, and to take it away *under my arm, for better for worse.* It is a beautiful Picture.

ITALIAN.

This Picture is a curious little gem from Wilson's palette, and it seems as if the Artist painted it *immediately* from Nature. It bears so much truth, and from the size, I am inclined to think that it must have been an *out-door sketch.* It is of the same dimensions as the Etching.

THE WHITE MONK.

This Picture, I apprehend, derived its appellation from the circumstance of a monk in white, praying at the foot of a cross.

This composition was often painted by Wilson. Lady Ford has two of this subject; one is large, measuring nearly five feet in length, and proportionably high; the other, from which I took my present Etching, is much smaller,—being little more than two feet long, and about eighteen inches broad. They are both remarkable fine paintings.

I had the gratification of seeing a painting of this subject by R. Wilson, when it was in the possession of Mr. Townly, of Doctor's Commons, about ten or twelve years since.

It was certainly a most splendid work.—Mr. Townly, (as I understood,) purchased it for three hundred guineas, but he afterwards disposed of it to a picture dealer, who sold it to Richard Entwisle, Esq. of Rusholme, near Manchester.

VIEW ON THE THAMES.

This view is a little below Richmond, and seems to have been a subject much in Wilson's estimation, or in that of his friends,—for it was often handled. The concentration of light, and its mellowed reflections in the water, is quite charming.

THE MURDER.

The subject of this Etching is negligently painted, but was only intended as a sketch for after consideration.

This design he converted for his well-known admirable composition of "Meleager."—It evinces great strength of conception for the wild horrors of a land storm, and is truly appropriate to the fearful hunt of the boar.—As the first thought of a composition so well known in the world, it is curious, and bears much interest when we compare it to its offspring, which was so beautifully engraved by our immortal Woollett.

LAKE OF NEMI.

This is a sweet painting in the possession of Lady Ford.

The Lake of Nemi has afforded many opportunities for the display of Wilson's magnificent designs.

Mr. Blundell, (of Intz, about eight miles from Liverpool,) has, with many others, one of Wilson's largest and best paintings of this subject, in which he has introduced the Nymph Calisto exposed to Diana.

It is called "Lake of Nemi," or "Speculum Dianæ."

RUIN NEAR VENICE. 36

This is a very small painting, and one of his very early productions, most probably painted abroad.—It possesses much force and truth of effect. The ray of light passing the old Tower on the wall to the figures on the path, is dashed in with that brilliancy of colour so peculiar to Wilson's style.

PART OF MECÆNAS' VILLA, AT TIVOLI.

This view has often occupied Wilson's attention. The painting of this subject, in the possession of Lady Ford, is finished with every necessary attention, and the Master shines on the canvas. Mr. Constable of the Royal Academy has one of the same view, as well as another, (intended as its companion,) both admirably painted.

VIEW ON THE TIBER,

WITH ROME IN THE DISTANCE.

This is one of the grandest pictures in the whole of Lady Ford's collection, and is painted with unusual strength of colouring. The blaze produced by the effect of the setting sun is most sublimely felt, and the rich deep tones are executed with the force of Rembrandt.

CONCLUDING REMARKS.

Of the several paintings from which I have made my present Etchings, the above are the only ones of which I have been enabled to obtain any satisfactory information, or have thought worth while to notice; either on account of some very remarkable feature of excellence displayed, or for the purpose of introducing to notice, any other works of Richard Wilson of similar subjects, or duplicates, which he frequently painted.

Perhaps Lady Ford's collection of the paintings of Richard Wilson, is altogether one of the most splendid in the World, being about fifty in number. This collection is interspersed with works of other Masters, mostly of the Old School,—and in high preservation.—Sir Richard Ford, and the late Rev. Mr. Booth, were two of Wilson's great friends and patrons. On the death of the latter, his sisters, Lady Ford, and Miss Booth, became possessed of his collection of paintings, and on the decease of Miss Booth, they were all centred in the possession of one individual, the present Lady Ford of Gloucester Place.

Painted by R. Wilson
1771

The Original is in the Possession of [illegible]

Etched by J. Hastings
1821

The Villa of Mecenas near Tivoli

Landscape.

LAKE OF ALBANO

1760

Part of Mecenas Villa at Tivoli.

Ruin near Venice

Mrs Vyvyan Stoke House Exeter, 1905

Painted by R. Wilson.

The Original in the Possession of Lady Ford. 3 in. by 4½

Etched by T. Hastings. 1824.

Part of the Amphitheatre at Rome.

Painted by R. Wilson.

Engraved in the Possession of Lady Ford 24th July

The Lake of Nemi — Italy —

Etched by J. Hastings 1821

Painted by R. Wilson.

The Murder.

Which supposition gave rise to the well known one of

On the Thames.

TEMPLE of MINERVA MEDICA

Painted by R. Wilson. RA

The Original is in the Poſſeſſion of Lady Ford.

Etched by P. Hastings.

From the Collection of

On the ARNO

Painted by R. Wilson RA — The original is in the Possession of Lady Ford — Length 22 inches 3/4 Inches — Breadth

On the Bay of Baiæ, Italy

Painted by R. Wilson R.A.

View on the Strada Nomentana Italy

Painted by R. Wilson, R.A.

Engraved by J. Hastings.

Published in London

The White Monk.

R. Wilson. RA

The Original is in the Possession of Lady Ford

Etched by J. Hastings
publd by London 1832

On the River Tiber, near Rome

Painted by R Wilson R.A.

ITALIAN SCENERY.

Etched by T. Easlengs
Published in London

Arthur Ford Harvey 1848

Painted by R. Wilson

R. Wilson

Etched by J. Hall, A.R.A.

Painted by R Wilson 1772

Edwards Sculp

Painted by R. Wilson

The Original ... in the Possession of J. Hastings Esq^r 2 2 by 1 5

TEMPLE of VENUS with Part of the BAY of BAIÆ

Etched by J. Hastings n^r
and published Aug^t 1821 in London

Painted by R. Wilson

The Original is in the Possession of Lady Ford

Etched by F. Hastings and publd. in London 1st Decr. 1821

Sion Park and House on Thames from Richmond Gardens

Painted by R Wilson

The Original in the Possession of Lady Ford

Etched by J. Hastings
and published - London

The Bay of Baiæ from Posiluno

Painted by R. Wilson.

The Original is in the Poſſeſſion of Lady Ford

Etched by J. Hastings
Published by Longman & Co London 1821

NEATH CASTLE

Glamorganshire

Painted by R. Wilson. RA

The Original is in the Possession of Lady [illegible]

Etched by T. Hastings
published July 1811

VIEW of LARECI near ROME

Painted by R. Wilson

The Original is in the Possession of Lady Fordham

Etched by J. Hastings and published in London 1821

VIEW IN ITALY

Painted by R. Wilson 1774

The Vale of Narni.

about 40 Miles from Rome

The Original is in the Possession of Lady Ford.

Etched by T. Hastings 1821

Publ.d in London July 1821

Painted by R. Wilson

Old Convent near Venice

Painted by R. Wilson

THE LAKE OF NEMI

Painted by R. Wilson
1776

The Original Painting is in Possession of J. Hastings.

Etched by J. Hastings. 1820

THE GYPSIES.

Published by J. Hastings, 9 the Old [illegible] October 1820

Painted by R. Wilson.

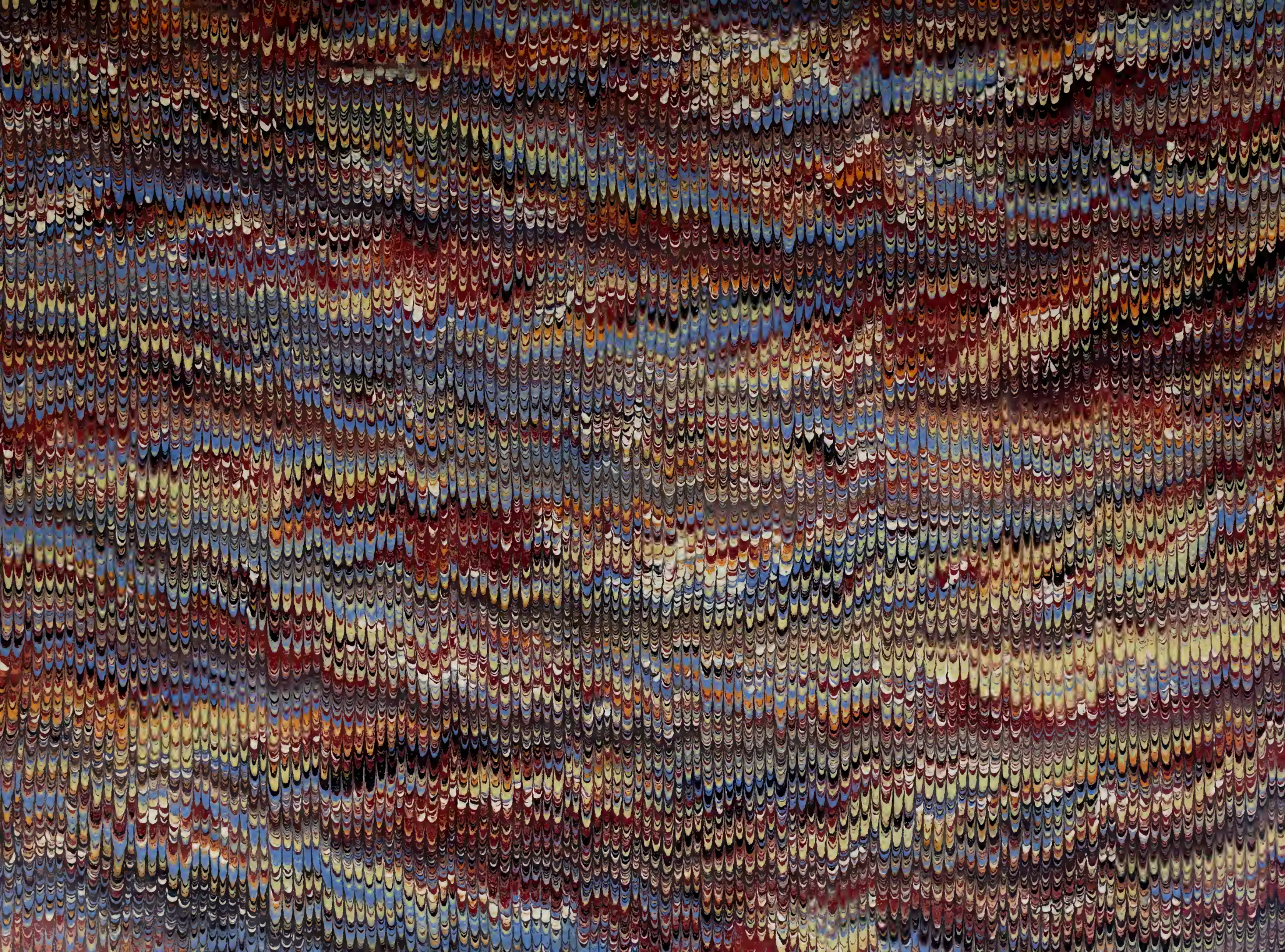
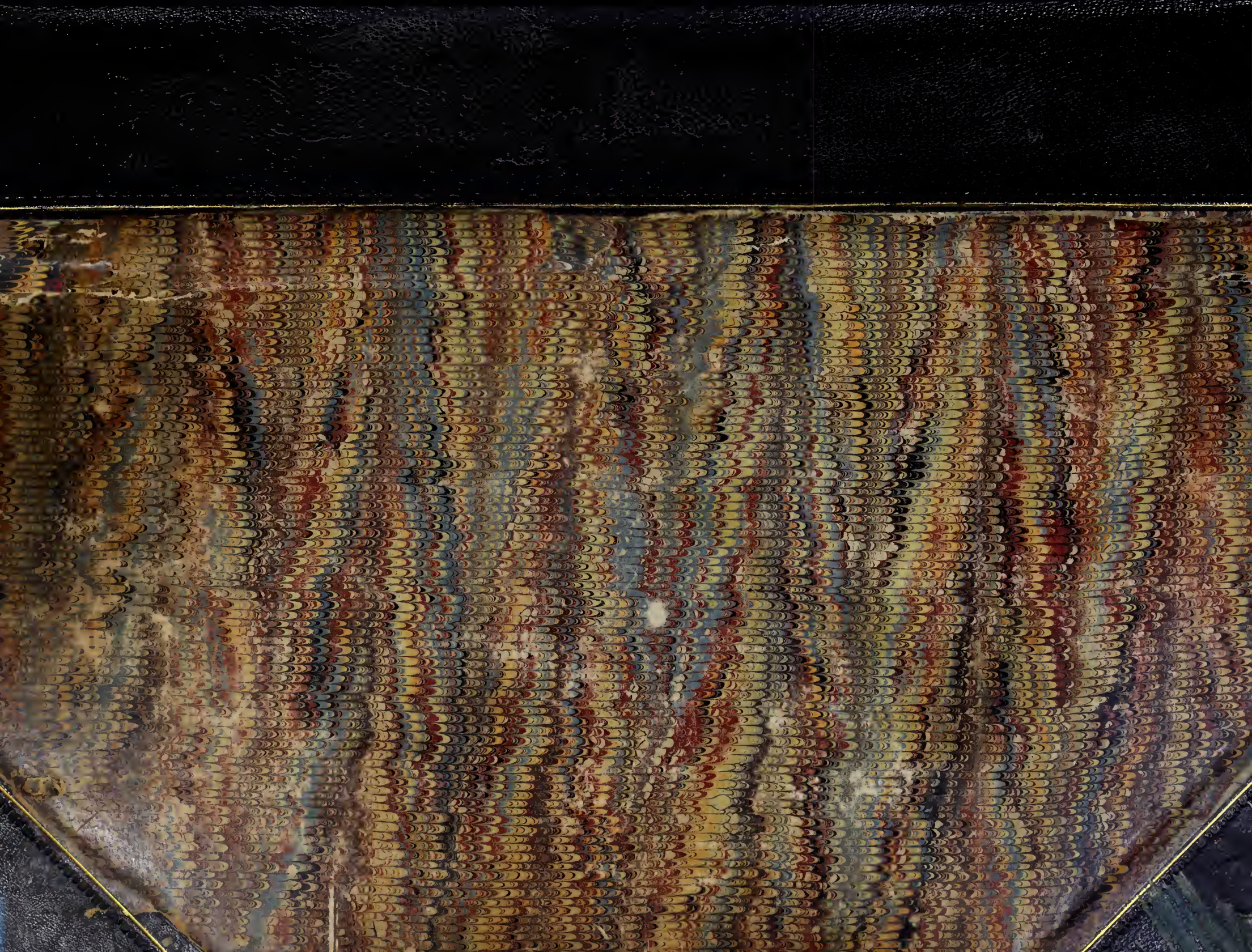
Etched by I. Hastings 1820

VILLA EMELIA

The Lake of Albano

NEAR ROME

ON HOUNSLOW HEATH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